

Prime Minister Ahern never lost focus or patience.

For America it was a wonderful foreign policy success. President Bush and Clinton played important and constructive roles. In the Congress, both houses linked arms and worked together. It was a case of everyone sticking together with one purpose.

But the most credit should go to the people of Northern Ireland who expressed their hope for the future, first by supporting (as did the Republic) the Good Friday Agreement and most recently by giving Sinn Fein and DUP leaders a mandate to proceed. Optimism was expressed in the vote and the leaders need to move forward and do the hard work of governing.

I know all Americans join together with our Irish friends in celebrating this miraculous achievement.

#### PERSONAL EXPLANATION

### HON. ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, May 14, 2007*

Mr. CUMMINGS. Madam Speaker, on May 7, 2007, due to a family illness, I missed the following recorded votes: rollcall vote No. 302, on H.R. 407—The Columbia Pacific National Heritage Area Study Act. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye"; rollcall vote No. 303, on H.R. 1025—The Lower Republican River Basin Study Act. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye"; and rollcall vote No. 304, on H. Res. 371—In Observance of National Physical Education and Sports Week. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye."

#### VIETNAMESE HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

### HON. ZOE LOFGREN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, May 14, 2007*

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Madam Speaker, I rise because May 11 is Vietnamese Human Rights Day, and my conscience will not let me stay quiet on this very troubling issue. I also rise today to applaud the efforts of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom on their recent report on the status of religious freedom in the world.

I am deeply troubled by the findings of the Commission, but I can't say that I'm surprised. The Commission made the same recommendation last year: Vietnam should be placed on the State Department's list of Countries of Particular Concern because of government repression towards many religious believers.

The Vietnamese government's campaign to force people to renounce their faith, their detainment of dozens of religious prisoners, and the harassment and physical mistreatment of some believers and their families amounts to inexcusable human rights violations.

In Vietnam's quest to gain Permanent Normal Trade Relations with the United States, and access to the WTO, the Vietnamese embarked on a disingenuous public relations campaign to cleanse its image as a human rights violator.

Secretary Rice caved in to the campaign of their communist government and removed Vietnam from the Countries of Particular Concern list.

But some of us in Congress were not fooled by this advertising campaign.

My constituent, Cong Thanh Do, a United States citizen, was unjustly arrested in Vietnam last August while on a family vacation. Mr. Do is no criminal. He is nothing more than a peaceful democracy and human rights activist who wrote articles that he then posted on the internet while he was living in the United States.

Vietnam held Cong Thanh Do imprisoned for over a month before he was released after we pressured the Vietnamese government.

Because of the evidence suggesting that Vietnam made little progress on human rights—especially given the detention of my constituent, Cong Thanh Do—I told the administration it would be a mistake to grant Permanent Normal Trade Relations with Vietnam and I voted against it.

Three of Mr. Do's supporters in Vietnam were tried and sentenced yesterday for 3 to 5 years of prison each. Their crime? Promoting a multi-party democratic system in Vietnam through peaceful means and sending email communication to my constituent.

After Vietnam joined the WTO, I think it is obvious that the conditions of religious freedom in Vietnam did not improve. They have worsened severely.

The Vietnamese government removed Father Nguyen Van Ly from his parish and on March 30th sentenced him to 8 years in prison for allegedly conducting propaganda activities to harm the security of the state. His sentence is an outrage.

Vietnamese police, on March 6, 2007, arrested a pair of human-rights lawyers, Nguyen Van Dai ("Die") and Le Thi Cong Nhan (pronounced "Lay Tee Kohng Nhun"), for organizing training sessions for political activists in the capital. There are many other dissidents who have been imprisoned simply for expressing their thoughts and attempting to practice their faith freely and openly. Nguyen Van Dai has since been charged with disseminating propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted. Their trials and sentencing are scheduled for this Friday in Vietnam.

Le Quoc Quan ("Lay Kwook Kwun") and his law colleague Tran Thuy Trang ("Truhn Twee Trahn") were arrested on the day Mr. Quan returned to Vietnam from his congressionally-sponsored National Endowment for Democracy fellowship in the United States. His arrest is not only a human rights violation, it is a calculated insult to America and specifically to the United States Congress.

With all of the human rights problems in Vietnam, the question we must ask is, "What can we do to help?" The United States has the power to influence Vietnam on these important moral issues through the use of our many diplomatic and economic tools—if only we have the political will and moral courage to use these tools.

One tool is the Countries of Particular Concern list.

I believe it was a mistake to take Vietnam off the list. I agree with the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom that Secretary Rice should redesignate Vietnam a Country of Particular Concern.

I believe the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, Michael Marine, should provide financial support to the loved ones of the political detainees, using the Human Rights Defender's fund. The wives of many of these political prisoners are left without any financial support. We have a moral commitment not just to these people who have been imprisoned unjustly; we have a moral obligation to relieve the financial burden that these arrests have caused for the families of the brave.

Vietnam claims it has made significant progress in allowing more freedom of religion under its Ordinance on Belief and Religion, but this is simply untrue. Under this law, affiliated organizations of recognized churches may "register for religious operation." In practice, however, only 2.5 percent of all house churches have been approved for registration. And of the one hundred house churches that actually have been registered, only five have been registered for religious operation. No real progress has been made.

Until Vietnam makes real progress on religious freedoms and human rights, instead of paying lip service in order to get trade agreements, I will continue to press this administration to stand up for the rights of the Vietnamese people to speak their minds and practice their faith.

#### SUPPORT FOR H.R. 1429, IMPROVING HEAD START ACT

### HON. BETTY MCCOLLUM

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, May 14, 2007*

Ms. MCCOLLUM of Minnesota. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 1429, the Improving Head Start Act. Having had the opportunity to serve on the Education and Workforce committee for 6 years, I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to finally vote for a Head Start reauthorization bill that will improve on the success of this critical program.

Head Start is one of the most successful programs funded by Congress. Research shows that children who attend Head Start enter school better prepared, are less likely to need special education services, and are more likely to graduate. The Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank reported a few years ago that there is actually a 16 percent rate of return on investment in quality early education. In my opinion, funding education for our youngest children is the most efficient and important investment we can make.

The biggest challenge facing Head Start has been lack of resources. In Minnesota, less than half the children eligible for Head Start are served due to funding shortages. And nationwide, only 2 percent of children eligible for Early Head Start receive services. We can do better. Increasing access to Head Start is good for children, for families, for communities and for the federal budget.

The Improving Head Start Act will expand and improve Head Start. It will allow access for 10,000 more children and prioritize expanding Early Head Start. It increases teacher qualifications and helps to attract quality teachers by improving salaries. It will also improve coordination with other early education programs, ensure that parents continue to play